
Together with Heather, Bookazine's new program emphasizing Bookazine Kids and offering the expertise and passion of head children's book buyer Heather Doss, came about because "we realized we had to share her," as Kathleen Willoughby, v-p of marketing and online development, said. "She's an amazing combination of book buyer and children's book evangelist and has changed the way we do things in the short time she's been here."

A Bookazine employee only since April, Doss made "amazing connections" at the regional shows she attended. "We used her great presentation at SIBA as a handout," Willoughby continued, "and we couldn't keep it in stock."

Modeled on the New England Independent Booksellers Association's book doctor program--which makes booksellers with expertise in particular areas available to other NEIBA members who want advice--Together with Heather includes "doctors' hours." Doss will be available 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays to answer any questions from booksellers. Among the "prescriptions" she will be able to offer are reports, a variety of lists, including bestsellers, as well as display and point-of-purchase materials. The company also has dedicated parts of its Web site to children's books and Doss has her own spot that's updated regularly with links to her reviews and other information.

In the spring, in a first for children's books, Bookazine plans to make presentations for booksellers "who want to come into the office here and have Heather go over hot titles for the season," Willoughby said. In addition, the day will likely include a tour of the warehouse, meetings with staff, goody bags, distribution of many ARCs and lunch. The company may hold a similar event in the fall next year, too.

Doss spent nine years managing a Barnes & Noble and then a Waldenbooks store and has been involved with and contributed reviews and other material to the New England Children's Book Association. "I was a general manager but kids were always my specialty in the stores," she said. "I know from my retail background that the best way to get sales up is to get retailers excited about it."

Doss, who called herself "passionate about children's books" and estimated that she reads 80%-85% of the galleys she receives, said that children's books "almost need an individual who's read most of the titles. You can't just read the back of the book and know it. You have to be able to know what age groups a book is for and be able to relate it to other titles in a series." Independents "love getting that information. They ask questions like, 'What have you heard about this new chapter book series?' 'For a child who's devoured Harry Potter, what's next?' " And then there's the most basic one: " 'What're the hot children's books?' "

She noted, too, that if a store doesn't have someone who knows children's books, selling them "can be very tricky." Although a children's section may be much smaller than the adult section, the children's section can have as many subjects as an adult section, "so it's important to know age groups and titles," she continued. And the same holds true for specialty stores. "A mystery store with some children's books won't want every Encyclopedia Brown book."

With Together with Heather, Bookazine aims to reach out "not only to children's booksellers but general booksellers who sell children's books," Ron Rice, sales manager, emphasized. He also said he sees the program as an important way to partner with children's booksellers and said the company may create an advisory council.

Cindy Raiton, v-p of sales, said that Bookazine now has several buyers and salespeople like Heather Doss, which she said helped differentiate the company from "the big guys with telemarketers." This takes us "a step above being a wholesaler."--John Mutter